

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 DHA-02 ORM-02

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2460

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

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E. O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PBOR, MY, RP

SUBJECT: THE SABAH DISPUTE

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 4497; (B) KUALA LUMPUR 4383

1. SUMMARY: IN THE WAKE OF THE VISIT HERE OF THE SABAH CHIEF MINISTER, THE GUIDED PHILIPPINE PRESS IS HEARDING THE EARLY RESOLUTION OF THE SABAH DISPUTE. WE BELIEVE THERE IS A FAIR CHANCE THAT THE GOP AND THE GOM WILL MANAGE TO WORK OUT A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION TO THE DISPUTE AT THE FORTHCOMING ASEAN SUMMIT. END SUMMARY.

2. PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT ONCE AGAIN APPEARS TO BE MOVING TOWARD SETTLING ITS LONG-STANDING DISPUTE WITH MALAYSIA OVER SABAH. FOLLOWING THE DEPARTURE JULY 15 OF SABAH CHIEF MINISTER BATUK HARRIS SALLEH AFTER A WEEK-LONG VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES, GUIDED MANILA PRESS HEARLDED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IMMINENT RESOLUTION OF DISPUTE. PRESS REPORT INDICATE MARCOS IS READY TO RENOUNCE PHILIPPINE CLAIMS TO SABAH FOLLOWING PHIL-MALAYSIAN DISCUSSIONS AT UPCOMING ASEAN SUMMIT CONFERENCE IN KUALA LUMPUR AND THAT ANY FINANCIAL CLAIMS BY HEIRS OF LATE SULTAN OF SULU WOULD BE ENTERTAINED BY GOM. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF, HOWEVER, MALAYSIAN EMBASSY COUNSELOR DECLINED TO CONFIRM PRESS REPORTS

AND MERELY NOTED THAT SABAH CHIEF MINISTER WAS "QUITE OPTIMISTIC" ABOUT FUTURE PHIL-MALAYSIAN RELATIONS WHEN HE LEFT MANILA.

3. ACCORDING MALAYSIAN COUNSELOR SECOND TOPIC OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN HARRIS SALLEH AND GOP CONCERNED ESTIMATED 75,000 PHILIPPINE REFUGEES IN SABAH. REFUGEES, MOSTLY ELDERLY OR RELATIVELY YOUNG, FLED TO SABAH DURING HEIGHT OF FIGHTING IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES IN 1973-74. AT PRESENT MOST ARE STILL JOBLESS AND THEREFORE A SUBSTANTIAL BURDEN ON SABAH'S RESOURCES. ACCORDING COUNSELOR, REFUGEES DO NOT DESIRE TO RETURN TO THE PHILIPPINES. HE STATED THAT MARCOS INDICATED HE WOULD BE WILLING TO OFFER SOME FORM OF ASSISTANCE TO SABAH TO HELP WITH BURDEN OF REFUGEES AND THAT REFUGEE SITUATION WILL BE SUBJECT OF FORMAL TALKS AT LATER DATE.

4. AS HAVE OTHER MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS, HARRIS SALLEH EMPHATICALLY AND PUBLICLY DENIED RECENT GOP ASSERTION THAT SABAH IS BEING USED AS TRAINING BASE FOR MNLF. GOP HAD GONE TO EXTENT IN RECENT WEEKS OF FORMALLY PROTESTING TO GOM ALLEGED USE OF SABAH AS TRAINING AREA.

5. IN JULY 16 STATEMENT FROM ZAMBOANGA PHILIPPINE ARMED FORCES SOUTHERN COMMANDER REAR ADMIRAL ROMULO ESPALDON REVEALED FURTHER THAT MALAYSIAN EASTERN AREA COMMANDER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GENERAL JAAFAR BIN ONN HAD ESTABLISHED A NETWORK OF COAST WATCHERS TO PREVENT THE USE OF MALAYSIAN TERRITORY AS A SANCTUARY BY "UNAUTHORIZED GROUPS."

6. PRESS REPORTS THAT HARRIS SALLEH ALSO DEPARTED MANILA WITH PHILIPPINE AGREEMENT TO SPONSOR SIX SCHOLARSHIPS FOR SABAH STUDENTS TO STUDY AT UNIVERSITY OF PHILIPPINES AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL, ESTABLISH "AGRICULTURAL STATION" IN SABAH, AND TO ASSIST IN A FISH BREEDING PROJECT AND SUGAR CANE PILOT PROJECT.

7. COMMENT: WHETHER HARRIS SALLEH'S OPTIMISM IS WELL FOUNDED OR MISPLACED REMAINS TO BE SEEN. AT THE BALI SUMMIT MARCOS REPORTEDLY PROMISED TO RENOUNCE PHILIPPINE CLAIMS TO SABAH BUT DID NOT FOLLOW THROUGH. NONETHELESS, GIVEN THE UPBEAT PRESS COVERAGE OF HARRIS SALLEH'S VISIT, THE GOP'S DESIRE TO FORESTALL MALAYSIAN SUPPORT OF THE MNLF AND THE PRESUMED AIM OF BOTH COUNTRIES TO STRENGTHEN ASEAN, WE BELIEVE THERE IS A FAIR CHANCE THAT THE GOP AND GOM WILL FINALLY WORK OUT A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION TO THE SABAH DISPUTE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. ATTITUDE OF REFUGEES POSES NO PROBLEM FOR MARCOS WHO REPORTEDLY DOES NOT WANT TO TAKE

THEM BACK. HE APPARENTLY DOES NOT DESIRE TO ASSUME THE
BURDEN OF PROVIDINGFOR THEIR WELFARE AND FEARS THAT THE
YOUTH MAY BE A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF NEW RECRUITS FOR THE
MNLF.
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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